

Honorable Chairman and members of the Education Committee,

My name is Becky Stockton and I live in Helena, Montana.

Thank you for giving the citizens of Montana an open forum to express our thoughts regarding the education of our children. My husband and I have two children who have two different personalities with different weaknesses and strengths. As parents who are intently involved with their children and who take the responsibility of educating their children totally on their shoulders, we knew that we wanted the best education possible for them and in doing that, we have used the freedoms of choice to develop the best education for our children.

In the process of using the freedoms of choice, we used five different learning institutions to fit our children's needs, those learning institutions were public, private, home school, correspondence High School and the Vo-Tech. Each one has their advantages and disadvantages but the learning institution of homeschooling fit our children needs and our lifestyle the best.

Homeschooling gave us the freedom to figure out our children's learning style, so that we could adapt the curriculum to them. Example: both of our children are audio learners, so a lot of curriculum was based on using audiotapes.

It gave us the ability to set the children's learning at a faster pace if they understood the material well or we went slower for them to learn the concept before going on to the next level. This method of learning also provided one on one teacher instruction, so we always knew if they understood the material or not before we went to the next concept or the next grade level. It also gave us the freedom to change the curriculum at any given time if our children did not understand the process given in that certain curriculum or we would find another curriculum to make it work for that child's needs. We never gave our children a chance to fail; we always made sure they understood the material before advancing to the next grade level.

We also had the freedom to raise our children with Biblical values and morals because God gave us the undeniable rights to do so. That is why he gave the responsibility to the father and mother to raise them and not the government.

Homeschooling gave us the freedom to set our own learning schedules; not working around the government school, but my husband's work schedule, so we did more family events and educational trips as a family. In the process, we built a lasting family bond that was so important to the unity of our family.

Because of homeschooling we did not have the discipline problems we see in the schools today. Since we did not have other children to disrupt class, we never wasted time in correcting such problems, so the education process was never delayed.

I could go and on but I won't because of time restraints, but I do want to inform the committee of one thing I did see in the public school system that definitely needs to be addressed. Our son, Tyler took one class at the local public high school here in Helena. The class was called Cisco computer networking. He was an excellent student and received an "A" in the class. But there was one situation that occurred that has bothered us since. Prior to this class our son was accepted to a summer internship at the Montana Science Institute. He spent everyday, 8 to 5pm. five days a week for three months doing a science experiment. Since the internship was free, his only requirement was to attend two science fairs and one symposium and of course these events occurred during the public school year. When it was time for Tyler to go to the Science Symposium he needed to miss two days of school. Tyler asked permission from his teacher to miss class and she said it was ok. But when our son informed the administration staff, they said that it would be counted as an inexcusable absence because the school was not involved in doing this event. After many phone calls and a personal visit by my husband, that inexcusable absent was finally changed. This episode made us realize that the school was not interested in our son's education. They were actually punishing him for striving to learn more. But as the result of how the funding system works in this state, the administration staff are more focused on the attendance of that student than on the education of that student.

Today, as a citizen, mother, educator and tax payer, I ask the committee to seriously look at the ways we fund the public education in this state. I would like the funding to focus on educating the student and not the fact of just having the student physically present in that seat on the day of roll call to be able to receive that money. I also would like to encourage each one of you to always keep the freedom of choice of education available to all parents.

Thank you for listening.

Becky Stackton